

VZCZCXYZ0001
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHKB #1049/01 3081217
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 031217Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0286
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHMH/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3113
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1177

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 001049

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/CARC AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/03/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: ELECTION WRAP-UP WITH CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION

Classified By: Political and Economic Counselor
Robert Garverick, for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On October 31 Embassy officials met with Central Election Commission Chairman Mazahir Panahov to wrap up issues related to Azerbaijan October 15 presidential election. Overall, Panahov was proud of CEC's work during the election period and grateful for the aid received from the international community. He acknowledged some problems that Embassy observers witnessed, and pledged to correct them prior to the next election by "punishing" polling station workers who committed violations. Panahov was upset about the OSCE/ODIHR statement and especially the EU presidency statement on the election, and claimed there continue to be double standards for Azerbaijan versus Armenia. Panahov is traveling to the United States to observe the American election and to attend an IFES conference, which should be an excellent opportunity for him to witness a competitive, free, and fair election. END SUMMARY

CONDUCT OF ELECTION IMPROVED BUT PROBLEMS EXIST

12. (C) On October 31 Embassy officials met with Central Election Commission (CEC) Chairman Mazahir Panahov and Head of the CEC's International Relations Department Rovzat Gasimov. Overall, Panahov expressed satisfaction with the conduct of the election, and expressed appreciation for the help given to the CEC by the international community. He stated that perhaps if participation had been broader the election numbers might have been different, but the outcome would have been the same. He thanked the .S. Embassy for its continued cooperation with the CEC.

13. (C) Without prompting, Panahov agreed that some polling stations experienced problems during the ballot counting stage, including ones in Sumgayit that Embassy observers had witnessed. When Embassy officials asked for more information on what would be done to correct the problems in Sumgayit, Panahov then claimed to have little information about the incident, and said the Embassy should have reported the problem. Panahov and Gasimov then had a short side conversation in Azerbaijani language where Gasimov reminded him of the details of the problem, and that the Embassy had reported the incident. Panahov then announced in English that these precinct election commission members "should be punished." Later in the conversation, Panahov acknowledged that Presidential Legal Advisor Shahin Aliyev, whom the embassy had also contacted on election night, had called him about the incidents. (NOTE: After the end of the meeting Gasimov asked the Embassy to send again the details of all polling stations where observers witnessed problems, so he

would have evidence of all misconduct. The Embassy will provide this list.)

DISAPPOINTMENT WITH EU AND OSCE/ODIHR STATEMENTS

¶4. (C) Panahov also expressed disappointment with the statements released by OSCE/ODIHR and particularly the EU Presidency regarding the election. Panahov pointed to one passage in the OSCE/ODIHR report regarding the fact that the CEC never issued an instruction on tabulating polling station results at the district level, claiming this information was wrong, and in addition "any child knows how to input information on a computer and email it." He felt the OSCE continues to have double standards regarding elections in Azerbaijan versus those in Armenia. On the EU presidency statement, Panahov felt it was out of step with the statement made by the EU Commission and by Javier Solana, and therefore maybe "someone else had written it and the French did not read it before signing." He did not believe, however, that this "someone else" was American. (Note: several other commentators, publicly and privately, have strangely suggested in recent days that the USG must have written European statements about Azerbaijan's election.)

PLANS FOR MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

¶5. (C) Panahov claimed that they had a process in place to review the presidential election and make changes ahead of the 2009 municipal elections. He did not offer any specifics on how this review process would function, however. When pressed on possible areas for improvement, Panahov stated that more education for polling station workers was necessary to correct problems like those in Sumgayit. Panahov wanted to continue cooperation on this training with the international community.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) Panahov was clearly proud of the work the CEC had done over the past year, and was very sensitive to any criticism of the election. His stated desires to continue working with the international community and to punish the election officials in Sumgayit who had committed violations are good signs of his intentions to continue improving Azerbaijan's capacity to conduct free and fair elections. It is not clear, though, that Panahov has the political muscle or will in Baku to address problems in a serious manner, particularly if those problems include regional figures loyal to the ruling party and President. Such decisions, it seems, must be taken at a higher level, probably within the Presidential Apparatus. Panahov and Gasimov both traveled to the U.S. after the meeting in order to participate in an International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) conference and to observe the U.S. election. This should be an excellent opportunity for these election officials to witness for themselves the dynamics of a competitive, free, and fair election.

LU